DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 443 009 CE 080 460

AUTHOR	Loper, Paul
TITLE	Chormmunity: Co-Creating Embodied Community.
PUB DATE	2000-00-00
NOTE	5p.
PUB TYPE	Opinion Papers (120)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Adult Development; Adult Education; *Adult Learning; Body Language; *Cooperation; *Empowerment; Learning Processes; Learning Theories; *Transformative Learning
IDENTIFIERS	Egan (Kieran); *Somatization

ABSTRACT

Chormmunity is a group's collaborative, embodied text-making. It explores interfacings of intention, metaphor, empowerment, inspiration, vision, negotiation, collusion, the propositional, the practical, the experiential, the presentational, the tacit, the sociological, the psychological, epistemology, methodology, and ontology. Chormmunity is liberatory pedagogy; it invites meaning schemes and perspectives to be wrought via community, creativity, and the body. Many thinkers and philosophers believe prelinguistics from our respective infancies undergird the subsequent linguistic nature of the human experience. K. Egan's model of developmental understanding (1997) evolutionarily explores this in correlation with individuals' growth. According to the model, as the Mythic, Romantic, Philosophic, and Ironic Understandings are grown into, they build on and incorporate the Somatic. P. Reason (1994) calls even more strongly for embracing our somatic selves. The ways he advocates the body's primacy suggest knowledge creation as a way of knowing and link transformative learning to holistic inquiry. With symbols, humans can negotiate more information than is tolerable in our incarnateness's finiteness. Metaphor is a linking mechanism on the presentational to propositional continuum. In entering into learning, one necessarily enters into liberation. Given the intrinsic collectivity of humanity, collaboration is paramount pedagogy. Creation--a reciprocal and dialogic process--is part of freedom, the ability to name what is in new ways and acquire power. (YLB)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

ED 443 009

Chormmunity: Co-Creating Embodied Community

Paul Loper, MA, doctoral candidate, the California Institute of Integral Studies

This Innovative Session takes to heart practice-based *exploration of Transformative Learning, aggressively following Mezirow's injunction to "avoid the... separation of the cognitive from the conative and affective dimensions of apperception and the psychological from the cultural in the learning process" (Mezirow, 1991, p. 42). Chormmunity adds somatic, imagistic/metaphoric, spatial and especially collaborative processes to verbal/rational meaning making, helping "reactivate the intentionality implicit in perception" as he identified the task of education (Mezirow, 1991, p. 22).*

Keywords: Somatics. Presentational knowing. Collaboration.

In *Transformative Dimensions of Adult Learning* (1991) Jack Mezirow states: "In order to be free we must be able to 'name' our reality, to know it divorced from what has been taken for granted, to speak with our own voice" (p. 3). Given the interrelatedness of humanity, what is the relationship between individual freedom and collective freedom? With whose voice is the speaking spoken, if we are in creative co-arising into selves, cultures, and their symbiotic relationships? Naming is an act of language, and language is a socially mediated framework within and by which identities and worlds are able to be discerned, shaped and reinvented. What about naming in non-verbal languages? *Chormmunity* (*chor* as in "choreography," *mmunity* as in "community") is the collaborative, embodied text-making (or "dance," or "ritual") by a group, and thus explores, by engaging multiple layers of our consciousnesses, the interfacings of intention, metaphor, empowerment, inspiration, vision, negotiation, collusion, the propositional, the practical, the experiential, the presentational, the tacit, the sociological, the psychological, epistemology, methodology, and even ontology. Chormmunity is liberatory pedagogy; it invites meaning schemes and meaning perspectives to be wrought and aligned via community, creativity, and the body.

Meaning-making and the Body

Many authors and thinkers and philosophers entertain the notion that prelinguistics from our respective infancies undergird the subsequent linguistic nature of the human experience. Kieran Egan's (1997) model of developmental understanding evolutionarily explores this in correlation with individuals' growth (as a species, so as babes, we knew ourselves and the world via our bodies before the introduction of language). As what he names the Mythic, Romantic, Philosophic and Ironic Understandings are grown into they build on and incorporate the Somatic. As people living today, in the West, we are often so overwhelmingly reinforced in Philosophic or Ironic Understanding that we are jolted — even traumatized — when our own enduring Somatic Understanding wiggles into the game. Chormmunity explores taking this wiggling into our culture- and identity-making full-frontally, so to speak. In this light Mezirow's line, "the task of education is to reactivate the intentionality implicit in perception" (Mezirow, 1991, p. 22), can be read in relation to the wealth of knowing we embody; as humans, this knowing arises out of a unique capacity for making meaning out of our experience first through the body. To what degree is the predisposition to linguistics an evolutionary outcome of the fact of the actual design of the human body (bi-pedal, opposing thumbs, upright stance, etc.; predominant visual [dupal retinal, frontally aligned] sense, narrow auditory range, etc.; brain stem, limbic system, cortex, neocortex, etc.), and thereby to what degree do we have opportunities to "play" with our ordering the constitution of experience (identity and reality constructs) by working with the body?

The characteristic of intentionality is inherent in Mimesis (what Egan, working from Merlin Donald's *Origins of the Modern Mind*, sees as initial human culture and mind [which we still, perforce, carry]), and is key to our primary capacities for prelinguistically making meaning, and then for our equally-primary operations in communications with our fellow humans for "locating" or "artifacting" meaning (which directly plays into the development of meaning schemes and meaning perspectives). "Presentational construal" (Mezirow, 1991, p. 46) invites a child to adapt physically — neurologic and muscular organization — in internalizing norms and categories of the culture; as an adult, the physicality is ironically more grossly under one's control, yet less "impressionable" in subtle pathways. Chormmunity nonetheless recognizes the value of directly bodily enacting vision as at least working in the vein of the somatic organizing of our learning frames, thereby awakening a fundament of the learning process, even if simplistic control or creation is eclipsed (which is why the collaborative aspect of Chormmunity is so crucial).

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
P. Loper
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

CE 080 460

Peter Reason (1994) makes the call for embracing our somatic selves even more than Egan. His Future Participation Consciousness asks our empowered reality-making and our sensitive, interdependent listening to dance together: "once we allow ourselves to return to a direct experience of feeling the presence of the world, we can re-vision our way of thinking and thus change our experience of perception" (p. 36). "...we need...a return to the concrete and kinaesthetic knowing of the body" (p. 37). Although situated in inquiry (as opposed to adult education per se), the ways Reason advocates the body's primacy suggest knowledge creation as a way of knowing, and can be seen to link transformative learning to holistic inquiry. Meaning perspectives and schemes are both ways of knowing and knowledge, are both learned and authored. In pedagogically employing physical creative processes, the both/and nature of these distinctions is awakened. Furthermore, the (pedagogic) experience is concretized in the mind-body of the learner as an actual experience (i.e. a physical experience, with the dance of perception as a — literally — internally, kinesthetically, as well as externally entered-into phenomenon), which solicits the living mobility of learning as multi-dimensional, operative, spacious, and vital.

Symbol and Metaphor

We project symbols onto our sense perceptions via meaning perspectives (Mezirow, 1991). With symbols, humans can negotiate more information (I include here more than just material reality) than is tolerable in our incarnateness's finiteness. This negotiation not only allows anxiety to be managed, thus preventing immobility, but — especially — provides the tools, building blocks, material, or ingredients for action, for going about our human business of identity- and culture-making. As the initial sphere of perspective construction (Mezirow, 1991, p. 32), symbolic models are potent items for exploring transformative learning. Boyd and Myers (1988) prioritize identifying "the symbols which are critical to the learning that is being undertaken" (p. 281). In building a movement text, or ritual, Chormmunity asks participants to orchestrate a "document" of their creation, using the grammar of bodies in time and space to articulate a "content" of meaning accessed predominantly through image, symbol and metaphor. If we understand the archetypes of the Self as negotiated symbols on the scale of the species (Boyd & Myers, 1988), then adjusting meaning schemes to include our involvement with them comprises transformative learning ("...call[s] into question our taken for granted [sic] frames of reference...to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, and reflective so that they may generate beliefs and opinions that will prove more true or justified to guide action" [—from the Transformative Learning Conference website]). While playing with images doesn't necessarily call symbols to the explicitly cognitive realm, for purely rational reflection, transformative education acknowledges the partialness of that mode in transforming meaning schemes and perspectives, and admits the pursuit of "truer" frames of reference as one of integration and realization of one's being, which perforce continues to operate out of and with the pre- and suprarational (Boyd & Myers, 1988). In engaging images, symbols and archetypes are stirred, "speaking" (especially collectively) in modalities appropriate to them, yet increasingly consciously nonetheless. A goal of Chormmunity would be to intentionally activate symbol(s), thus letting them help in our learning, ever pursuing the aim of fuller conscious awareness/integration, while accepting the very "truth" of the multiply-languaged nature of our membership in life. (So, to use the analytic psychology-based terms of Boyd and Myers, the ego is not continually the locus of identity; similarly, Chormmunity goes past the deep-seated notion in Western culture that separate individuals are sufficient loci of identity.)

"Meaning is construed both prelinguistically, through cues and symbolic models, and through language. These two ways of construing meaning are interactive processes involving two dimensions of awareness, the presentational and the propositional" (Mezirow, 1991, p. 4). The process of a Chormmunity workshop begins verbally, but in conversation, not lecture, definitely not in printed text. Granted, we are today irrevocably enmeshed in the post-Alcuin/calligraphic, post-Gutenberg/printing press world, and to pretend otherwise would be ludicrous — and we are concerned here with adult education — so the participants' operating in Philosophic and Ironic Understandings is a given. But the workshop's verbal-rational modality stays oral, at least, and quickly "moves back" into the imagistic, then the somatic. All along the way the participants are fully present as rational, cogent selves; the interest is in the "interactive processes" along the continuum of presentational and propositional. Metaphor winds up being a linking mechanism on this continuum: propositional knowing is based in metaphor, in conceptually relating all subsequent abstractions to basic physicalities (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980), and presentational knowing baldly uses imagery, as iconic "placeholders," to articulate meaning in form other than the experience (although the empirical aspect of the presentational, using the material itself to engage in the learning/creating experience, is not representational — quite the contrary; this is where the most powerful level of transformation can occur as referents are temporarily suspended in an actual availability to a relatively "de-schemed," "de-perspectived" act of participation in life, a relatively defenseless meeting of Merleau-Ponty's "Invasion").

Formally shifting from a "rehearsal" mode to a "performance" mode, the dance, or movement text, is ritually enacted at the end of the workshop. Thus, the very doing of the co-created "document" situates the might of metaphor in a powerful nexus of transformation — of self, as shaper of and shaped by the systems that gave rise to the self, and of the systemic field of meaning (making sense: "*enliven[ing] the senses*" [Abram, 1996, p. 265, emphasis in original]) suffusing the self.

> New metaphors...create a new reality...when we start to comprehend our experience in terms of a metaphor, and it becomes a deeper reality when we begin to act in terms of it. If a new metaphor enters the conceptual system that we base our actions on, it will alter that conceptual system and the perceptions and actions that the system gives rise to (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 145).

In the actual enactment of the ritual, the collective physicality, the palpability of the time-space-energy arrangement, the tangible, affective, kinesthetic, cognitive, social manifestation of the design of the group *is* a metaphor for meaning perspectives, teasing the unique intentionality we humans possess evermore into the epistemic, sociolinguistic and psychological dance of our expression.

Creativity, Collaboration and Freedom

> Freedom, equality, democracy, literacy, and emancipation are not to be understood as handmaidens of modernization or national development but rather as necessary conditions for making meaning of experience that are implicit in the nature of human communication and learning (Mezirow, 1991, p. 208).

These ideas are ultimately intertwined: learning and communication involve action, voice, social currency, ability to access information and resources, respect, and so on. In entering into learning one necessarily enters into liberation. Mezirow (1991) argues that the postmodern world challenges adults today to move beyond merely adapting to changing circumstances (by applying old ways of knowing) — but to come into "more inclusive, discriminating, open" frames of perspective, to more justly act (and so become empowered in the formation of those circumstances). Yet whose construct of "empowerment?" For what is the postmodern world if not the overwhelm of the modern world, of its legates of the Enlightenment, including rationalism, reductionism, and the objectification of knowledge, and of hierarchical control implemented in the name of the liberation of the few (read: colonialism)? Surely we need to "get systemic" and become aware of our interconnectedness, and to transform our models of how power is deployed in the construction of culture. The paradox, of course, is that we are only as empowered as we aren't exploiting that and those over which and whom we have power. Given the intrinsic collectivity of humanity, collaboration is paramount pedagogy.

bell hooks (1994) points out "...our ways of knowing are forged in history and relations of power" (p. 30). By exploring collaboration we don't bypass our formations, but rather have the opportunity to be in more conscious relation to how our socialization inherently involved inequality; we open the can of worms of reinforcing or changing symbols and schemes learned as children through inequality. Since the structures that we use to support adult learning and transformation carry the weight of socialization as much as any ostensible subject matter, addressing together the paradox of power helps ensure "...that these contradictions are embraced as part of the learning process..." (hooks, 1994, p. 56).

Employing intentional creativity — explicitly making something — naturally risks the exploitative incarnation of power: power over, as opposed to power with. Having the material be "inert" (paint, clay, etc.) has been a device of Western culture for emphasizing the liberatory aspect of the "creator" over the mutuality of the creative process. As David Abram (1996) reminds us, this is not even the case with "inert" materials, for "art is really a co-operative endeavor, a work of cocreation in which the dynamism and power of earth-born materials is [sic] honored and respected" (p. 278). To emphasize the reciprocal and dialogic process of creation, the use of collaboration with other people, including engaging our respective unique inroads to the mysterious act of visioning, even in allowing extant socialized schemes of oppression the likelihood of surfacing, forces us to tap into a kind of integration — perhaps awkward, always local, individuated, often magical. As Mezirow, referring to Bowers, posits, new forms of authority can come out of negotiations of new meanings generated from moving beyond and expanding traditional forms of authority. "It is in these 'liminal spaces' in thought and social practice...between established patterns of thought and behavior, that new definitions and new concepts of authority can be negotiated" (Mezirow, 1991, p. 3). The act of creating, of not only manifesting something but of generating the ways it is held (grammar and content,

so to speak), is part of that freedom the opening of this paper refers to. When "those who can name 'what is' in new ways…[and then] acquire power" (ibid.) are you *and* me, holding open the role of the liminal, we approach speaking with our own voice.

A Note on Fun

Although disorienting dilemmas certainly are provoked with the Chormmunity work, the transformative learning has tended to be affirming and even exhilarating for participants of these workshops. When one system of functioning is sustained past its usefulness we do often see sharp and painful emotional responses to loss of identity and constructs of reality. And life will continue to throw us the proverbial curve balls. But in undertaking a playful, if nonetheless reverent, pedagogical approach, the strengthening of a relational process to the larger context — rehearsing the capacity for temporary and ephemeral texts, as opposed to rigidly-held frames of construal — can help instill a kind of health that promotes less catastrophic responses and quicker mobility in the dialogic nature of negotiating inner and outer worlds. And delight is never a bad thing.

References

Abram, D. (1996). The spell of the sensuous: Perception and language in a more-than-human world. New York: Vintage Books.

Boyd, R. D. & Myers, J. G. (1988). Transformative education. International Journal of Lifelong Education, no. 7, 261-284.

Egan, K. (1997). The educated mind: How cognitive tools shape our understanding. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

hooks, b. (1994). Teaching to transgress: Education as the practice of freedom. New York: Routledge.

Lakoff, G. & Johnson, M. (1980). Metaphors we live by. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Mezirow, J. (1991). Transformative dimensions of adult learning. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Reason, P., ed. (1994). Participation in human inquiry. London: Sage.

Transformative Learning Conference. [website] Available: http://www.tlconference.org/overview2000.htm [2000, July 10]

BEST COPY AVAILABLE